



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F 2010 02840

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Use of Police Helicopters

Request and Answer:

Request

I would like to make the following request under the Freedom of Information Act about the use of helicopters by your force:

- 1 - Please can you supply me with a list giving details for all flights by your force helicopter for the month of August 2010, including flight times.
- 2 - For each flight, please provide full details of what role the helicopter was fulfilling - (for example, whether it was assisting in pursuit of a suspect, search for missing persons, monitoring crowds etc).
- 3 - For each flight, please also indicate what tangible results the aircraft helped to achieve - (for example, in the arrest of suspects or the location of missing persons).
- 4 - Please can you state whether your force has its own helicopter(s) or whether it shares an aircraft with another force. If so, please explain how this arrangement works.
- 5 - Please can you provide me with the cost to run your helicopter for the last financial year.
- 6 - If you are able to do so, can you please tell me the hourly cost to your force of keeping the aircraft flying.

Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

As this information is not held in an easily retrievable format it is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450. To give an example of cost, to answer question 1 for 1 helicopter, it is estimated it would take a member of staff up to 24 hours to extract this information. They would have to search each individual flight and record these details separately.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

Section 16 – Duty to provide advice and assistance

Although excess cost removes the service's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, as a gesture of goodwill, I have supplied information, relative to your request, retrieved before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this will be helpful, but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request.

In relation to question 4, PSNI does have its own helicopters and further information relating to the PSNI's helicopters can be found on the below link.

http://www.psni.police.uk/new_police_helicopter

In general terms the PSNI's helicopters were utilised during August fulfilling the role of Public Order coverage, locating of missing persons, assistance with car crime, football matches, concerts etc.

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psni.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.